

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /079 W

-----180321Z 080307 /66

R 171249Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5038

INFO AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE FREETOWN 0939

LONDON FOR SEITZ

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINS, PINT, SL

SUBJ: SIERRA LEONE: WEEKLY ROUND-UP I, MARCH 10 - 16

REF: STATE 51312

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: SIERRA LEONE REMAINS CALM WITH NO REPORTS OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN ANY PART OF THE COUNTRY. CURFEW, WHICH HAD BEEN LIFTED PROGRESSIVELY FROM 7 PM TO 9 PM TO 11 PM, WAS ABOLISHED ENTIRELY EVENING OF MARCH 9 (FREETOWN 0869). ELECTORAL ACTIVITY REMAINS THE CENTER OF NATIONAL FOCUS, EVEN THOUGH A FIRM DATE FOR THE ELECTION HAS NOT BEEN SET. IN RESPONSE TO POPULAR CONCERN, PRESIDENT STEVENS ASSURED NATION FORTHCOMING ELECTION WOULD BE FREE AND FAIR, BUT HE HAS NOT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STATED WHETHER OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WOULD BE PERMITTED TO CONTEST FREELY AND FAIRLY. END SUMMARY

2. A CASUAL VISITOR TO SIERRA LEONE TODAY WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO REALIZE THAT VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS ERUPTED LAST MONTH IN FREETOWN AND IN THE PROVINCES. THE RETURN TO SURFACE NORMALCY APPEARS COMPLETE. ALL SHOPS IN FREETOWN ARE OPEN,

SCHOOLS ARE FUNCTIONING AND FEW POLICE ARE IN EVIDENCE. DURING THE PAST WEEK APC CENTRAL COMMITTEE, HEADED BY PRIME MINISTER KAMARA-TAYLOR SINCE VICE PRESIDENT KOROMA'S ACCIDENT (FREETOWN 773), HAS BEEN MEETING WITH PROSPECTIVE APC CANDIDATES AND DISTRICT COMMITTEES TO CHOOSE A SLATE. DESPITE PRESIDENT STEVENS' ASSERTION THAT APC CANDIDATES WOULD REFLECT THE POPULAR DESIRES OF THE DISTRICT COMMITTEES, FINAL DECISION WHICH PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE WILL BE GIVEN APC "SYMBOL" WILL BE MADE BY CENTRAL COMMITTEE, MOST LIKELY AFTER CONSULTATIONS WITH STEVENS PERSONALLY.

3. A FIRM DATE FOR THE ELECTION REMAINS TO BE SELECTED. IN ADDITION TO COMPLETING THE ROLLS OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS, ELECTORAL COMMISSION HAS TO CONSTRUCT 800 VOTING PLACES BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE UNWILLING TO RENT THEIR HOUSES FOR THIS PURPOSE, 3,000 TIN VOTING BOXES HAVE TO BE IMPORTED BECAUSE ONLY 800 VOTING BOXES USED IN THE LAST ELECTION CAN BE FOUND. IN ADDITION, 3,000 KEROSENE LAMPS AND 800 HURRICANE LAMPS HAVE TO BE IMPORTED TO PROVIDE LIGHTING FOR THE VOTING PLACES. SOURCES ESTIMATE THE GOSS WILL SPEND ABOUT TWO MILLION LEONES ON THE ELECTION, ALL UNBUDGETED. PARLIAMENT STILL HAS NOT BEEN PROROGUED NOR HAS A DATE BEEN SET FOR NOMINATION DAY. ACCORDING TO LAW, ELECTIONS MUST BE HELD WITHIN 90 DAYS OF THE DISSOLVING OF PARLIAMENT AND WITHIN THREE WEEKS OF THE FIXING OF NOMINATION DAY. PROROGUING OF PARLIAMENT LIKELY BY END OF MARCH.

4. IN RESPONSE TO GROWING EXPRESSIONS OF DOUBT THAT THE ELECTION WOULD BE FREE AND FAIR, PRESIDENT STEVENS GAVE PUBLIC ASSURANCES THAT VIOLENCE ON ELECTION DAY WOULD NOT BE TOLERATED AND THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CITIZENS WOULD BE ABLE TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE WITHOUT HINDERANCE OR INTIMIDATION. HOWEVER, STEVENS GAVE NO INDICATION WHETHER OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WOULD BE PERMITTED TO CONTEST APC CANDIDATES FREELY AND FAIRLY. SLPP HAS OFFICIALLY NOTIFIED ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF ITS INTENTION TO RUN CANDIDATES IN ELECTIONS AND HAS GIVEN ASSURANCES TO STEVENS THAT THE PARTY WILL RESPECT STEVENS' TENURE IN OFFICE. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AMONG INFORMED CIRCLES IS THAT STEVENS WILL HAVE TO PERMIT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES TO RUN IN SOME DISTRICTS WHERE ANTI-APC SENTIMENT IS SO STRONG THAT VIOLENCE WOULD ERUPT IF THE ELECTION WERE MANIFESTLY UNFAIR.

5. STEVENS HAS MADE QUICK TRIPS IN PAST THREE WEEKS TO DISTRICT CAPITALS OF KAMBIA, PORT LOKO, MAKENI, AND MAGBURAKA, ALL IN THE NORTH. HIS PUBLIC SPEECHES ARE ALL INTENDED TO SHOW HE IS VERY MUCH IN CHARGE. HIS PRIVATE MEETINGS INDICATE HE WILL INDEED HAVE PERSONAL HAND IN SELECTION OF APC CANDIDATES. SAMUELS

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
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